

***Eureka* Stop**

#9 The Only Way Across the Bay

Today, the Trans-Bay commuter has many options for travel. Be it by subway beneath the water, by bridge over the water, or modern ferryboats on the water, choices literally abound. During her time, however, ferryboats like the paddle wheeled *Eureka* were the only way to cross. Without them, San Francisco would have been cut off from its surroundings and paralyzed for lack of its work force. *Eureka* is a rare link to this long ended era.

Although originally built to carry railroad cars, for most of her career, *Eureka*'s staple job was carrying commuters across the bay. On other occasions, she carried automobiles and every once in a while even carried cattle on their way to market. This last job could provide a lively crossing. One story recounted, "In the early twenties, a cattleman brought his stock to town on the steamer *Eureka* from Sausalito... [However,] the rope pen was inadequate... One thing led to another, and soon the cattle were trying the stairs, demanding -and getting- attention in the restaurant, and herding a flock of frightened passengers hither and yon in wild disorder."

After a peak year in 1930, however, the diversity and quantity of *Eureka*'s passengers and cargo steadily declined. When construction started on the Bay Bridge in 1933 even ferryboat diehards were given a tangible sign that the end was not far off. One story stated, "... the towers and girders that seemed to rise out of the Bay were recognized... as a gallows for the ferryboats."

For *Eureka* the end finally came in 1957 when she suffered a minor engine breakdown. Although an easy fix, it was the final and ever-so-gentle nudge that pushed her off the precipice of commercial feasibility. *Eureka* would steam no more. If you look and listen carefully, however, you can still picture the white water tracks of paddle wheels across the Bay, the two thousand odd commuters during rush hour, and hear the cacophony of footsteps, and perhaps a hoof step or two, echoing off the wooden decks.